

class first and leaves tired leftwing ideas where they belong—in the history books. And when the President is ready to work with us, he should know we will be here waiting for him. We have always been here, actually, and many Members of his party, with other helpful ideas, have been here too, waiting for him—Democrats with smart ideas the President has not been willing to consider so far.

All he needs to do is pick up the phone. If he is willing to actually work in a serious way with Members of both parties, we will send him some things to sign with that pen too.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business for 1 hour, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the majority controlling the first half.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, earlier this month we commemorated the 50th anniversary of President Johnson's declaration of "unconditional war on poverty." That war on poverty was a massively successful initiative. It helped tens of millions of Americans lift themselves out of poverty, reduced hardship, empowered people to build new opportunities for themselves and their future.

We see some of the residue of this. Today, food stamps ensure that children do not go to bed hungry at night. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act insisted that all children, regardless of background, can learn and have an equal opportunity for education. Legal Services helps people with limited resources seek protection from exploitation. Low-income families fight poverty in their own communities by helping to lead community action agencies. The war on poverty and the Great Society encompassed a tremendous list of achievements that I cannot even begin to do justice to today.

However, we know we still have more work to do. Too many of those success-

ful programs and policies have been reduced or rolled back under subsequent Presidents and Congresses. What is more, our economy has changed and in fundamental ways, with decades of waste, stagnation, and rising income inequality.

Now we must urgently turn our attention to policies that will ensure that working families can still get ahead in America. We must recognize that tens of millions of working Americans struggle to put food on the table, a roof over their head, and pay their bills every month. This is a fundamental failing of our economy. It is something we not only have a moral obligation to fix but we have the ability to fix. We can do so first by raising the minimum wage, one of our Nation's simplest and most effective means of lifting working families out of poverty.

I am so pleased President Obama has taken the first step in this effort. Last night at the State of the Union, he announced he would issue an Executive order that will require future Federal contracts to provide wages of at least \$10.10 an hour to our Nation's contract workers for the Federal Government. I applaud President Obama's bold step to ensure that the Federal Government is a leader in promoting good jobs that pay fair wages. I think most Americans would agree that taxpayer dollars should not support companies that pay poverty wages. This Executive order is a strong step in the right direction. But now we in the Congress have work to do, to raise the minimum wage for the rest of American workers.

Again, I am so grateful for President Obama taking a strong leadership position, as he did last night, in calling for Congress to expeditiously work to increase the minimum wage.

We need to agree in this country that if you work hard and play by the rules you can earn enough money to support your family, keep a roof over your head, put some money away for a rainy day, have a secure retirement. The minimum wage played a critical role in doing that, which is why Presidents and elected leaders from both parties in the past have supported fair increases in the minimum wage. From time to time, we adjusted the minimum wage on a bipartisan basis to help working families keep up with inflation and the changing economy. But recently we have heard a new and disturbing set of talking points from our friends on the other side of the aisle. They claim that raising the minimum wage does not actually reduce poverty. They argue the minimum wage workers do not come from poor families or that no one stays at a minimum wage job long enough to be trapped in poverty.

Those all sound good on the talk shows, but the facts simply prove those statements are not true. The fact is a majority of people who would benefit from an increase in the minimum wage come from low-income households. Many of them have been trapped in

jobs at or near the minimum wage for years and years at a time. Indeed, when you listen more closely, the offensive underlying premise of all these arguments is that anyone can rise out of poverty if they just work harder.

Tell that to Nereida Castro of Des Moines. She and her husband both work minimum wage jobs in the fast food and construction industries. They have five children to support. But Nereida says they live day to day because of their bills and expenses. She said her family "has to limit many things to give to our kids to only make rent, to cover expenses. We have to limit everything."

A raise in the minimum wage would allow her to "live a life where I don't feel like I'm drowning."

Tell that tale about "you just have to work harder" to Nancy Salgado, 27-year-old single mother with two kids, ages 2 and 7. She worked at McDonald's for the past 10 years but makes only \$8.25 an hour. That is the minimum wage in her own State of Illinois. She struggles to be able to pay for necessities such as milk and shoes for her kids. She recently confronted the president of McDonald's USA, saying:

I'm a single mother of two. It's really hard for me to feed my 2 kids and struggle day to day. . . . Do you think this is fair, that I have to be making \$8.25 an hour when I have been working at McDonald's for 10 years?

For Senators and Representatives sitting comfortably here in Washington to preach to working mothers such as Nancy, struggling hard to get ahead, working 10 years at McDonald's—to tell them they are not working hard enough, that is beyond offensive.

No one disputes that hard work is a big part of the path out of poverty, but you also need a basic foundation of economic security to start building that better life. How are you supposed to pay for a community college course on \$7.25 an hour? How are you supposed to find a better job when you are standing in line at a food bank because your wages won't cover all your household expenses, and neither will your food stamps? How are you supposed to build a better life for your kids when you can't even find them safe childcare while you are at work? They just can't get ahead if their job traps them in poverty.

It has not always been this way. We used to agree that minimum wage works. People who perform some of the most difficult and essential jobs in our society should not have to live in poverty. The minimum wage kept families above the poverty line in the 1960s and 1970s. In today's dollars, a minimum wage worker in 1968—when the minimum wage was 120 percent of the poverty line—took home \$10.71 an hour or \$22,000 a year working full time.

Since the 1980s, the minimum wage has not kept up. Today the minimum wage is about 80 percent of the level of poverty. This is how far we have come down. The same family whose breadwinner worked at a job making minimum wage in 1968—look at where they